



Senator Jay Rockefeller's Legacy: A Timeline of Promises Made, Promises Kept for West Virginia's Steel Industry

Senator Jay Rockefeller is known as the "Senator of Steel" for his incomparable record of fighting for steelworkers. For more than 30 years, Rockefeller has been working for steelworkers, promoting investments in domestic steel, strengthening and promoting U.S. trade laws and protecting workers' pensions and benefits. As a senior member of the Senate Finance Committee, he has been able to oppose trade agreements that outsourced jobs, and been a strong advocate for legislation that has promoted domestic investments and American jobs. Rockefeller is a supporter of Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits, and has introduced legislation to permanently extend TAA's Health Coverage Tax Credit to make sure no American workers lose health coverage after they've lost their job to outsourcing. Further, the senator also fought for the creation of the Emergency Steel Loan Guaranty Program (ESLG), which provides government guarantees for loans to companies impacted by foreign trade. And in the early 1980s, he supported the employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) that allowed Weirton's workers to keep the plant alive.

1977

Rockefeller assumes office as Governor, and the steel industry in West Virginia is thriving. Weirton Steel was the largest employer in the state with approximately 14,000 workers.

1978

Rockefeller initiates talks between Nisshin Steel of Japan and Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel, which eventually resulted in the creation of a joint venture coating facility in Follansbee.

March 1982

National Steel announces the subsidiary Weirton Steel will close unless a buyer comes forward. When no corporate buyer materializes, Weirton steelworkers undertake a campaign to purchase the plant under the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). Various constituent groups, political leaders, Governor Rockefeller, management and labor join in the movement. The deal is finalized in January of 1984.

August 1985

8,200 workers walk off the job at Wheeling-Pitt because of a decision by the company to annul its labor contract and impose an 18 percent reduction in benefits. The workers decide to strike.

Senator Rockefeller intervenes to help resolve a long-standing strike involving thousands of employees at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel by convening meetings in Washington, and at a hotel near the Pittsburgh airport. Senator Rockefeller also goes to New York with the company's leaders to meet with banks and pushes General Motors to renew steel orders from the mill.

December 1986

Ground is broken for the construction of the first hot-dip Aluminizing and Galvanizing Line (AGL) at Wheeling-Nisshin in Follansbee. And in April 1988, Wheeling-Nisshin starts to operate its AGL, which is the country's first fully computerized, state-of-the-art steel-coating facility. This is the 1st of 20 Japanese companies to locate in West Virginia because of Rockefeller's efforts.

1987

The Steel Industry in the Upper Ohio Valley is thriving. Weirton Steel alone employs nearly 20,000 workers.

October 1996

A second dispute between labor and management leads to another strike at Wheeling-Pitt over pension benefits. The strike lasts for 10 months and is resolved with Senator Rockefeller's assistance.

June 1998

Senator Rockefeller sends a letter to President Bill Clinton explaining the Hando Steel situation and its potential impact on Weirton Steel and the Ohio Valley, urging President Clinton to address the issue directly with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung during President Dae-jung's week-long visit to Washington.

June 1998

Senator Rockefeller joins colleagues, union leaders and Weirton Steel officials to celebrate Weirton Steel's "Ohio Valley vs. South Korea Rally in the Valley" campaign which generates more than 12,000 signatures from Ohio Valley residents seeking to stop unfair trade practices by the Korean Government and Hando Steel. Weirton Steel launches the campaign to educate the public and to encourage trade officials to take action against South Korea for illegally subsidizing Hando Steel and directly paying the company's creditors.

October 1998

Senator Rockefeller introduces the “Trade Fairness Act of 1998” to give the President a new tool to deal with the current crisis in the domestic steel industry. The legislation, co-sponsored by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), would reform Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974, putting U.S. industries on a level playing field when taking action against import surges from foreign competitors.

November 1998

Senator Rockefeller visits Weirton Steel to discuss the foreign steel import crisis with company and union officials. The Senator tours the plant and holds productive meetings with Independent Steel Workers Union President Mark Glyptis and other union officials and company President Dick Reiderer.

January 1999

At a Senate Finance Committee Hearing, Senator Rockefeller renews his call for action to end steel dumping. The hearing features a panel of witnesses discussing steel trade.

January 1999

Senator Rockefeller speaks before thousands of steelworkers gathered for the “Stand up for Steel” rally in Washington. More than 77 buses travelled from Weirton alone for the rally. During the rally, Senator Rockefeller announces he will introduce legislation to impose quotas on foreign steel imports. Just a day prior, Senator Rockefeller introduced the “Trade Fairness Act of 1999” designed to give the nation new tools to stop steel import surges.

June 2000

Senator Rockefeller testifies before the International Trade Commission, urging the ITC to fulfill its responsibility for effective enforcement of trade laws.

May 2001

Senator Rockefeller introduces the “Save the American Steel Industry Act of 2001.” This bill would provide economic relief for companies facing consolidation and mergers – a move designed to help domestic producers of steel who have been hit the hardest by illegal foreign steel dumping.

May 2001

Senator Rockefeller sends a letter to President George W. Bush calling on the President to take immediate and decisive action to save crippled steel manufacturers. Senator Rockefeller outlines a specific plan of action beginning with a “Section 201” investigation on whether to temporarily level steel tariffs to trigger protections for the embattled steel industry.

September 2001

Following the tragic events of 9/11, Senator Rockefeller testifies before the ITC asking the commission to make an affirmative determination that the domestic industry has been seriously injured due to steel imports during the timeframe of the 201 investigation. As a result of 9/11, Senator Rockefeller publically concludes a weak steel industry is now a national security issue. Without domestic steel, we cannot rebuild from the national tragedy.

October 2001

The ITC votes affirmatively that the American steel industry has sustained serious injury as a result of foreign low-priced imports. Senator Rockefeller calls this a victory for the domestic steel industry and calls on President Bush to impose needed relief in the form of tariffs, quotas or quantitative restraints on all steel imports found to be injurious by the commission.

November 2001

At a joint steel caucus meeting with Administration Officials, Senator Rockefeller outlines his concerns regarding the urgent steel crisis facing the U.S. Steel industry. Senator Rockefeller tells U.S. Commerce Secretary Don Evans that the Administration must address retiree health care costs that hurt American steel makers’ ability to compete, as well as an expedited decision on a 201 remedy.

2002

Senator Rockefeller succeeds in pushing President George W. Bush to use his authority, called “Section 201,” to temporarily levy tariffs, a move credited with restoring steel prices to historic levels and enabling the industry to regain its footing and adjust to foreign pressures.

July 2002

Senator Rockefeller testifies before the ITC on behalf of the nation’s steel industry, strongly urging the commission to rule that illegal imports of cold-rolled steel have caused injury to the U.S. steel industry.

May 2003

Weirton Steel files a voluntary petition for protection under Chapter 11 of the bankruptcy code.

July 2003

Senator Rockefeller testifies before the ITC emphasizing the need to continue to protect this country's steel industry from a flood of imports. Senator Rockefeller tells the ITC that the Section 201 safeguards should stay in effect for the full 3-year period.

October 2003

Senator Rockefeller expresses concern about reports of a Weirton Steel plan that would eliminate retiree benefits as a way for the company to come out of bankruptcy.

2004

Weirton Steel is purchased for \$253 million by International Steel Group (ISG).

April 2004

Senator Rockefeller writes to Timothy Sullivan, then Director of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program (TAA) for the United States Department of Labor (DOL), offering strong support for the application submitted by the Independent Steelworkers Union representing former employees at Weirton Steel Corporation.

2005

ISG sells its holdings, including Weirton, to Mittal Steel.

June 2005

Senator Rockefeller writes to Lou Schorsch, CEO of Mittal Steel U.S.A. regarding the news that Mittal idled the No. 2 blast furnace at its Weirton plant, completely shutting down the hot end. That action laid-off more than 700 workers. In his letter to Schorsch, Senator Rockefeller questions Mittal's intentions for the facility and expresses concern that the facility will never re-open.

November 2005

Mittal officially closes the hot end in Weirton.

December 2005

Senator Rockefeller meets with Mittal Steel U.S.A. CEO Lou Schorsch in Washington to discuss the closing of Mittal's hot end plant in Weirton. Senator Rockefeller, extremely frustrated by the lack of consultation with local, state and federal officials by executives at Mittal, makes his views explicitly known. Senator Rockefeller tells Schorsch that Weirton deserves better.

December 2005

Senator Rockefeller offers his full support of the application to the DOL for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) submitted by Mark Glyptis and the Independent Steelworkers Union on behalf of steelworkers at Mittal in a letter to Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao.

2006

Mittal Steel becomes ArcelorMittal.

February 2006

Senator Rockefeller learns from the DOL that Weirton's steelworkers will receive TAA benefits.

April 2006

Senator Rockefeller submits written testimony to the ITC, demanding it continue the order against tin dumping. In 2000, Senator Rockefeller was credited with being instrumental in having the ITC put the order in place.

July 2006

Senator Rockefeller, Senator Byrd and Congressman Mollohan send a joint letter to Lou Schorsch contemplating the prospect of a Department of Justice (DOJ) directed divestiture of some component of Mittal Steel's tinplate manufacturing capacity in the United States. The DOJ ultimately forces Mittal to sell its facility at Sparrows Point – outside of Baltimore – instead of the Weirton facility.

October 2006

Senator Rockefeller testifies on behalf of the domestic steel industry at the Corrosion-Resistant Steel Sunset Review.

Early 2007

Mittal enters into agreements with Esmark to sell the company's tin assets in Weirton.

2007

Esmark purchases Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel.

February 2007

The DOJ forces Mittal to sell its facility at Sparrows Point – outside of Baltimore – instead of the Weirton facility. This causes the deal with Esmark to fall through.

March 2007

Senator Rockefeller meets with Lou Schorsch, now CEO of ArcelorMittal Flat Americas, to discuss the future of ArcelorMittal's operations in Weirton. Senator Rockefeller urges Mittal to either recommit to Weirton and its workers by reinvesting in the facility and running it at full speed or sell the facilities – both the tin and steelmaking components – to someone who is willing to run the company.

April 2007

The ISU completes a merger with the USW.

August 2007

ArcelorMittal announces it will demolish the old open hearth. This is seen as a positive step to free up some of the land in Weirton controlled by Mittal.

August 2007

ArcelorMittal closes the hot mill in Weirton, resulting in the lay-offs of nearly 250 steelworkers. This closure makes Weirton a "tin-only" facility. Total employment at ArcelorMittal in Weirton is down to approximately 1,200.

August 2007

As a result of the Mittal news, Senator Rockefeller convenes a meeting in Weirton with local business leaders, economic development officials, and local elected officials. Those in attendance discuss the future of Weirton with Senator Rockefeller and specific projects they could be helpful with – particularly since the steel industry future in the area is so uncertain.

September 2007

After meeting with locals in Weirton, Senator Rockefeller meets with Lou Schorsch in Washington to discuss ArcelorMittal's Weirton operations. During the meeting, Senator Rockefeller asks ArcelorMittal to reconsider the closing of the strip mill. Senator Rockefeller also asks the company to sell-off usable assets when there are willing buyers (at this point in time, Esmark remained interested in the blast furnaces to make pig iron). Finally, Senator Rockefeller uses this meeting as another opportunity to ask ArcelorMittal to part with usable land.

2008

Nisshin-Steel of Japan buys out all remaining shares owned by Wheeling-Pitt. Wheeling-Nisshin employs nearly 200 people in Follansbee.

2008

Russian-based Severstal purchases the former Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel from Esmark.

January 2008

Senator Rockefeller meets with ArcelorMittal officials in Washington to discuss the company's plans to sell unused land at their Weirton facility to spur economic development in the region.

April 2008

As a follow-up to the September 2007 meeting, Senator Rockefeller and the Discover the REAL West Virginia Foundation host a larger Economic Development Roundtable in Weirton. This economic roundtable brings together key players including local elected officials, business leaders, and economic development officials to discuss and identify strategies to grow Weirton's economy - including a discussion on the significant developable land in the area, particularly the nearly 1,800 acres owned by ArcelorMittal that the company is not using for the tin mill operation. During the meeting in September 2007, as well as follow-up discussions Senator Rockefeller had with community and business leaders, it became clear that there was no clear economic development strategy. Senator Rockefeller encouraged the group to come up with a clear plan for the area.

January 2010

Senator Rockefeller sends a letter to Michael Rippey, ArcelorMittal U.S.A. President and CEO, expressing his concern over ArcelorMittal's plan to lay off 171 employees in Weirton.

2011

RG Steel purchases Severstal. At the time, these facilities in WV, Ohio, and Maryland employ nearly 3,000 people. As part of the deal, RG takes out a line of credit from 11 different banks, backed by \$750 million in collateral. In the months that follow, they are unable to turn a profit. When RG begins laying off employees, Senator Rockefeller contacts General Electric CEO Jeff Immelt and writes letters to RG's owner Ira Rennert, GE Capital's CEO Dan Henson, and Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf urging them to protect jobs. Because of Senator Rockefeller's outreach, RG Steel secures enough cash by January of 2012 to rehire its laid off workers at Sparrows Point in Maryland and avoid additional lay-offs in WV and Ohio.

August 2011

Senator Rockefeller sends staff to Weirton to meet with Pat Ford, Executive Director of the Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle and his Board to discuss the ArcelorMittal land situation. Senator Rockefeller's staff is taken on a driving tour of the city to see the property firsthand and help discover new ways to develop the land.

September 2011

The Business Development Corporation finalizes the Regional Investment Plan for Brooke – Hancock counties. Senator Rockefeller specifically requested the community come up with this plan during his community roundtable in April of 2008.

2012

ArcelorMittal currently employs 950 people.

2012

Senator Rockefeller helps Wheeling-Nisshin announce they will be adding a new product line, a corrosion-resistant alloy called ZAM. Senator Rockefeller later writes to the Department of Defense (DOD) asking it to explore whether ZAM has any applications for military products such as improving corrosion-resistance on ships, vehicles, and buildings.

2012

RG Steel files for bankruptcy. Because of Senator Rockefeller's assistance, TAA petitions were approved for all of RG Steel's facilities.

February 2012

Senator Rockefeller writes to Lakshmi Mittal, Chairman and CEO of ArcelorMittal and Mike Rippey, President and CEO of ArcelorMittal U.S.A. encouraging them to maximize the economic potential of Mittal's Weirton property.

March 2012

Senator Rockefeller sends 3 staff members back to Weirton to meet with Pat Ford, Mayor George Kondik and USW Representative Mark Gylptis to get an update on the current status of Mittal's Weirton property. A larger roundtable meeting between Senator Rockefeller and community leaders is planned for April 2012.

March 2012

The Weirton Planning Commission approves ArcelorMittal's plan to subdivide the majority of its property in the city, setting the stage for a great deal of potentially valuable property. There are several areas the company is willing to part with, but the major areas that could be redeveloped are Brown's Island, the area surrounding the Williams Country Club and the company's northernmost plant.

March 2012

Representatives from American Port Holdings brief state officials and staff from Senator Rockefeller's office and Senator Manchin's office on their plans to purchase property from Mittal for future development.

March 2012

Senator Rockefeller sends a letter to the ITC urging it to uphold existing antidumping orders against Japanese tin producers. On April 11, the ITC will reconsider the order and determine whether to revoke it or keep it in place for another 5 years.

April 2012

Senator Rockefeller holds a roundtable in Weirton to discuss the available Mittal properties and urges community officials and business leaders to work together to bring jobs to the community.

March 2014

Senator Rockefeller signs on as a co-sponsor of Senator Sherrod Brown's Currency Exchange Rate Oversight Reform Act of 2013, which would prevent countries like China from devaluing their currency in a way that artificially deflates the cost of their imports into the United States.

Senator Rockefeller is giving a lifetime achievement award from the United Steelworkers of America and the Cold Finished Steel Bar Institute's "Man of Steel" award.